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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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MOHAMMEDAN ESCHATOLOGY AND DANTE'S OTHER WORLD

LEONARDO OLSCHKI

SHORTLY before his death Miguel Asín Palacios, the great Spanish Arabist, published a reprint of his famous book on *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Commedia* (Madrid-Granada, 1943), supplemented by a survey of the discussions raised by the first edition in 1919. For several years thereafter Danteans and Orientalists alike were involved in a controversy over the supposed Hispano-Arabic sources of the *Divine Comedy*.

In glancing through this substantial survey, the reader is at once struck by two facts: first, the extent of the debate throughout the republic of letters; and, second, the tense and passionate mood in which the matter has been discussed in different countries and circles without a general agreement ever being reached. Very few literary polemics carried on internationally between the two world wars reveal so clearly the psychological and cultural background of some contemporary trends of scholarship.

The controversy over the Islamic sources of Dante's poem has been vitiated and misled since the very beginning by the national and professional pride with which it was inaugurated.[1] Asín's purpose to claim for Spain, even if Moorish, a considerable amount of Dante's glory, and his insistence on this sentiment, induced that great scholar to overesti-

[1] *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Commedia*, ed. cit., pp. 2 and 420; *El Islam cristianizado* (Madrid, 1931), pp. 116 f.

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mate his findings and to magnify his conclusions. Supported by the almost unanimous consent of Orientalists who were less acquainted with Dante and his work, Asín attributed the general rejection of his thesis by Italian scholars to a sort of patriotic conspiracy intended to keep intact the poet's national and Christian figure in the centennial celebration of his death.[2]

Although somehow preposterous, this suspicion seemed justified in view of the consistency, and even violence, of the Italian criticism. In reality the Italians were well aware of the general ignorance and lack of interest of their mediaeval ancestors with regard to Mohammedan theology and religion. This mediaeval attitude has been recently confirmed and illustrated by Ugo Monneret de Villard, a learned and impartial scholar, whose essay on the subject does away with Asín's exaggerations and speculations but calls the attention of mediaevalists to some authentic and neglected expressions of Christian interest in Mohammedan eschatology.[3]

Long before this, however, the idea of Dante's taking inspiration for the structure and scenery of his other world from a nonexistent Latin translation of Ibn Arabī's *al-futūhāt-al-Makkiyya* had appeared fictional and even absurd.[4] When the contention died down, it left behind among Dante scholars a disturbing feeling of uneasiness and annoyance, while Asín and his adherents held stubbornly to their theory without adding new evidence to their problematic conclusions. For an Italian Dante authority, the uncritical acceptance of that theory was a mark of poor scholarship or an expression of charlatanism, characteristic of what Valdimiro Zabughin once designated as the "mala genía dei volgarizzatori."[5] At the same time leading Orientalists, such as T. W. Arnold in London and A. Guillaume in Durham, declared that Dante's direct imitation of Ibn 'Arabī was beyond doubt and embraced the general frame of the *Divina Commedia* as well as single episodes and, even more, its spiritual substance.[6]

After a deadlock of almost thirty years the well-known Italian Orien-

[2] *La escatología musulmana*, pp. 472 ff.

[3] Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Lo studio dell'Islām in Europa nel XII e XIII secolo* (Città del Vaticano, 1944; Studi e Testi No. 110), pp. 23-30, 45 f., 59 f., and *passim*.

[4] As a possible mediator between Dante and the mystic authors of Moorish Spain, Asín Palacios mentioned Brunetto Latini (*op. cit.*, pp. 371 ff.), while P. Mandonnet attributed Dante's supposed knowledge of Mohammedan eschatology to the Dominican missionary Ricoldo of Montecroce (see Villard, *op. cit.*, p. 54 note 2). None of these suggestions have a serious historical foundation. Latini devoted only a few insignificant words to Mohammed in his *Livres dou Trésor* (see critical ed. by Francis J. Carmody, University of California Press, 1948, p. 69).

[5] "Dante e l'Oriente," *Roma e l'Oriente*, XXI (1921), 7 ff. (a valuable article overlooked by Asín Palacios and all other scholars involved in this discussion).

[6] Asín Palacios, *Escatología*, pp. 493 f.

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talist, Enrico Cerulli, has recently thrown a ponderous volume[7] into the no man's land between the two parties. This event revives on a new basis the unsolved question of the Mohammedan sources of Dante's poem and of Islamic influence on mediaeval literature and Christian eschatology. One of the most surprising documents of this influence is the *Book of the Ladder* or *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj*, which diffusely narrates the legendary journey of Mohammed through the realms of punishment and bliss. This rather dull and somewhat confused description of Hell and Paradise, as shown by the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet, belongs to the uncanonical Mohammedan literature of the Middle Ages devoted to eschatological subjects and visionary tales. In the Western world the book was considered as a sacred text of Islam composed by Mohammed himself. Nevertheless, it escaped the attention of the learned Asín Palacios, whose work contains the most circumstantial history of Arabic literature on Mohammed's nocturnal journey through the other world.[8]

Although the *Book of the Ladder* gives the traditional episodes of Mohammed's legendary ascent, it lacks Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical weight, poetical tone, and mystical aura, which suggested Dante's supposed interest in his work. It was the popular character of the *Book of the Ladder* that determined its lasting success among Moslems and Christians alike. While Ibn 'Arabī's work hardly became known outside of some provincial and esoteric groups in Moorish Spain, the *Book of the Ladder* was widely read in the late Middle Ages and was printed in Venice as late as 1495 in the abridgment of an Italian Minorite. At the other end of the world an Uigur version of the text was transcribed in Afghanistan, around 1436, in a beautifully illuminated manuscript written for Tamerlane's son and successor.[9]

But the most impressive evidence of its popularity in the Middle Ages and of the keen interest of Dante's contemporaries in eschatological

[7] E. Cerulli, *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnuole della Divina Commedia* (Città del Vaticano, 1949; Studi e Testi No. 150), 574 p., 15 plates. Almost at the same time a Spanish edition of the same text appeared under the title *La Escala de Mahoma. Traducción del árabe al castillano, latín y francés*, by José Muñoz Sendino (Madrid, 1949), xxv, 561 p., 2 plates. On this edition see G. Levi della Vida, "Nuova luce sulle fonti islamiche della Divina Commedia," *Al-Andalus*, XIV (1949), 377-407. When I wrote the present article this edition was not yet available to me, so that I have had to confine my remarks on the *Book of the Ladder* as a supposed source of the *Divina Commedia* to the material collected by Dr. Cerulli.

[8] The book was ignored by all Arabists until Monneret de Villard (*op. cit.*, pp. 53 f.) called attention to it. This mention of the two manuscripts containing the French and Latin versions induced Dr. Cerulli, and probably also his Spanish competitor, to publish the texts in two independent editions.

[9] Fourteen of the fifteen plates which adorn Cerulli's edition show as many episodes of Mohammed's journey, and represent an important contribution to the knowledge of Islamic iconography and the history of post-Timurid Turco-Persian art.

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visions of that kind and origin is given by its translation into three Western languages and by numerous allusions and quotations to be found in the most diversified works of late mediaeval literature. They are all collected in Cerulli's book, which is mainly devoted to these aspects of the question. We learn from it that two men were instrumental in the propagation of the Arabic book in the Christian sphere. The first was a Jewish physician, Abraham by name, an intimate of King Alfonso X, *el Sabio,* who translated the book into Spanish in 1264 at the king's command. The other was a Tuscan exile, Bonaventura of Siena, who rendered the Spanish version into French and Latin.

Of this polyglot Italian writer nothing is authentically known, but it can be presumed that he met Brunetto Latini at the court of Castile where he was employed as a notary and scribe. As for the Jewish physician, Dr. Cerulli has collected some evidence of his literary activity and professional authority in the inner circle of the king's scholarly collaborators.[10] This identification is remarkable because of the frequency of the name Abraham among the Jewish physicians, scientists, and translators active in thirteenth-century Spain.[11] Unfortunately Abraham's Castilian version seems to be lost. An abridgment in that language, published in Cerulli's book, was once attributed to St. Pedro Pascual, but was probably written by a Rabbi Amer of Burgos, converted to Catholicism in 1295.[12]

Cerulli also gives the complete French and Latin texts by Bonaventura from a Bodleian manuscript and the Lat. 6064 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, together with the readings of an incomplete Vatican version written in the early years of the fourteenth century. Thus, a modern philologist is able to read in different versions the story of Mohammed's ascent and to investigate its episodes without relying on Asín Palacios' critical condensation of Ibn 'Arabī's narrative. In this complete display of Mohammedan eschatology we may follow the Prophet and his guide climbing the ladder that leads him through eight heavens to the angelic hosts, the throne of God, and the earthly Paradise.

In a crude mixture of transcendent imagination and dry didacticism, the book describes the wonders of Heaven, the delightful sights of Paradise, the seas, rivers, plants, and treasures of the other world, and then,

[10] *Op. cit.*, pp. 17 ff. Abraham "Alfaquím" (i.e. *al-hakīm*), the physician, translated also the astronomical treatise of az-Zarqāli and the *Cosmography* of Ibn Haytam (Alhazen). See *ibid.*, p. 526 and, for these authors, G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, I (1931), 721, 758.

[11] Lynn Thorndike, "More Abrahamism," *Isis*, XI (1949), 34 f., and the remarks of Levi della Vida, *loc. cit.*, p. 380, note 3. Another Abraham, a physician from Tolosa, is mentioned as a contemporary translator (together with Simon of Genoa) of the *Liber de Medicamentis simplicibus* by Serapion, Jr., printed in 1473. On this text and author see G. Sarton, *op. cit.*, II (1931), 229.

[12] Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 264 ff. and 327 f.

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on the downward way, the forelands of Hell and its fire, monsters, torments, and divisions, the bridge Azirat over which the souls have to pass, and "plusours autres choses qe i sunt" which would be too long to enumerate in detail. There is in this description of the other world a determined attempt to rationalize its structure, both scientifically and according to a moral system, which marks the essential difference between these elaborate visions of the later Middle Ages and the early Christian apocalyptical and eschatological treatises.

There is no doubt that this systematic remaking of the picturesque and voluptuous Paradise of the Koran reflects the trend toward a scientific theology, developed around A.D. 1000 by Avicenna the Persian and concluded shortly before 1200 by Averroes, the Spanish Moor of Córdoba. This scientific theology is the spiritual manifestation of thinkers who were, as was usual, physicians, astronomers, and cosmographers, and sought God in nature as well as in the Koran, or even without it. It was the same spirit that, in the Christian sphere, helped to build up Aquinas' system and Dante's three realms beyond the grave. Alfonso X was, in the secular field, the representative of this peculiar intellectual attitude embodied in the physicians, scientists, and literati who crowded his court much as they had flocked, a little earlier, to the residence of Frederick II in Sicily. It is certain that the transformation of the chaotic Christian other world into an orderly section of the universe took place under the same circumstances as those which placed Mohammed's garden of pleasure within a measurable cosmographical system of spheres and a corresponding hierarchy of angels. In both cases the visionary other world of the early Middle Ages took on a scientific shape through the adaptation of the heavenly host to the Ptolemaic system of the world.

This common intellectual trend explains the vague structural affinities between the monuments of eschatological literature in the late mediaeval commonwealth of culture. The question of similarities in episodes and details is a different one, and should be considered apart from the preconceptions and fallacies which led Asín's investigations of Arabic eschatological traditions to his challenging and misleading conclusions.

Dr. Cerulli has enumerated the analogies between the *Book of the Ladder* and the *Divina Commedia*. He points out that Gabriel the Archangel has in the former the function attributed to Virgil in the latter, and mentions (pp. 524-525) the parallelism of topics in the didactic sections of the two works and the coincidence of some details in the descriptions of the infernal scenery, torments, and episodes. There is likewise a striking conformity in the organization of the earthly Paradise, its springs and rivers, its protecting frame of purifying fire, the tree of happiness, and the symbolism inherent in these aspects of an enchanted garden. Finally, the structure of the mystical rose of the blessed in Dante's Empyrean seems to have its counterpart in Mohammed's

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seventh heaven thickly peopled with singing angels diving into an ocean of light.

Several circumstances support the impression that Dante might have drawn direct inspiration from an Arabic source accessible to the Christian reader in two literary languages of general knowledge. This opinion might be upheld by the evidence collected by Cerulli of the interest taken by twelfth-century Christian authors in Mohammedan eschatology.[13] Moreover, in Dante's lifetime some outstanding members of the school of Oxford, as well as Duns Scotus, Raymundus Lullus, and Ricoldus of Montecroce, participated in the discussions of Mohammedan philosophers about the reality and structure of the other world.[14]

The idea of a journey of the soul through Heaven and Hell had already inspired a philosophical allegory written in Sicily at the end of the twelfth century under local Arabic influence.[15] This circumstance might have determined the success of the *Book of the Ladder* and the general interest in Mohammedan eschatology, as shown for instance by Fazio degli Uberti, the great-grandson of the immortal Farinata.[16] In his dry and learned *Dittamondo*, written in imitation of Dante's poem shortly after 1350, the Hispano-Arabic treatise is mentioned as a book composed by Mohammed himself and is quoted for a description of his Paradise.

Yet, in discussing all these facts and circumstances, Dr. Cerulli always maintains his self-control and grants his readers the benefit of the doubt. He never draws hasty conclusions from the apparent analogies between the episodes, traits, and topics of the *Divina Commedia* and those contained in its supposed Mohammedan source. He never fails to call for a cautious appreciation of their comparative value and always refers to Biblical texts and Christian literature which could have inspired the same visions of Dante's poetical imagination.[17] If these cues

[13] *Op. cit.*, chap. xv.

[14] *Ibid.*, chap. xix ff.

[15] See M. Th. d'Alverny, "Les Pérégrinations de l'âme dans l'autre monde d'après un anonyme de la fin du XII^{e} siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, XIII (1940-42), 239-300.

[16] The passage is quoted and illustrated by Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 354 ff. It should be kept in mind that this interest of poets and laymen in Mohammedan eschatology was directed chiefly to Mohammed's delightful Paradise, which acquired an understandable popularity although—or because—it had been considered since its first mention in a Christian text as a "lupanar and locus obscenissimus" (*ibid.*, p. 370).

[17] Dr. Cerulli could have found many more Biblical and mediaeval parallels independent of Mohammedan sources if he had consulted the diligent work of Dr. August Ruegg, *Die Jenseitsvorstellungen vor Dante und die übrigen literarischen Voraussetzungen der Divina Commedia* (Einsiedeln-Köln, 1945), especially pp. 435-463, where every episode attributed by Asín Palacios to Mohammedan models is discussed in the light of the Scriptures and according to classical and mediaeval texts. More material has been collected also by Rudolph Palgen, in *Das Quellenproblem der Göttlichen Komödie* (Heidelberg, 1930), *Das mittelalterliche Gesicht der Göttlichen Komödie* (1933), and other contributions on the same problem.

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and suggestions appear sufficiently conclusive, the contributions of Mohammedan eschatology to Dante's work seem more and more problematic or indiscernible. This result may be illustrated by a few characteristic examples and some contributions from works not mentioned in Cerulli's thoroughgoing discussions.

Asín Palacios had already striven to prove that the gigantic cock which covers Mohammed's Heaven in most of its descriptions and, accordingly, also in the *Book of the Ladder*, was the direct model for Dante's angelic and imperial eagle which fills with its wings and glory the sixth of his heavens.[18] But apart from Ambrosius' and Prudentius' praise of the cock as a *mirabilis Dei creatura*, there are many symbolic eagles in the Bible from which the poet might have taken over the idea of his *santo uccello* without transforming a cock into a heavenly symbol of divine and royal justice.[19] It would be more suitable to the purpose if Arabists would explain from Mohammedan sources that curious deification of a cock, instead of carrying out a comparison between incongruous eschatological and poetical elements.

The same can be said (and has been said long since) about the ladder, the bridge, the tree, and other requisites of every staging of the other world attempted in the many Oriental and Western descriptions of its wonders and oddities.[20] Nor did it escape the earlier students of Dante's sources that most of these eschatological elements exist in the stories of celestial journeys of souls and seers since the Apocalypse of St. Paul popularized them at least three centuries before the Hegira.[21] Even the term *Scala Paradisi* had been familiar to Western readers of ascetic and mystic books after a treatise of this title, composed in France in the eleventh century, experienced a revival just when Friar Roberto Caracciolo inserted the *Scala Mahometi* into his Italian *Mirror of the Faith*.[22]

[18] *Escatología*, pp. 50 ff.; Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 527 ff. Dante describes his celestial eagle in *Paradiso*, XIX, 1 ff.

[19] Ezek. 17:3 (the great eagle with great wings); Isa. 40:31; Matt. 24:38; Rev. 4:7.

[20] See the literature quoted above in note 17; and for the single topics see Howard R. Patch, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), something like a comprehensive survey of the whole field, with a valuable bibliography.

[21] See Theodore Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* (London, 1935), and the studies of the same authors on "Dante and the Visio Sancti Pauli," *MLN*, XLVIII (1932), 387 ff.; "The Source of a Provençal Version of the Vision of St. Paul," *Speculum*, VIII (1933), 353 ff.; "The Passage of the Souls to Purgatory," *Harvard Theol. Review*, XXXI (1938), 53 ff.; and, for other episodes and visions, "The Throne of the Emperor in Dante's Paradiso," *ibid.*, XXXII (1939), 115 ff. On the Apocalypse of St. Paul see also Asín Palacios, *Escatología*, pp. 281 ff., and R. Rüegg, *op. cit.*, I, 255 ff., where the ancient sources of many of these early Christian visions of the other world are discussed in detail; and Silverstein, "Did Dante Know the Vision of Saint Paul?" in *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, XIX (1937).

[22] On the *Scala Paradisi* (or *Claustralium*), attributed to St. Bernard and others, see Dom A. Wilmart, O.S.B., *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du moyen*

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One of the most impressive parallels between the Mohammedan otherworld lore and Dante's vision is the stupendous image of the heavenly city of angels and blessed arranged in a luminous amphitheater in sight of the throne of God and described by Dante as a celestial rose.[23] Asín's attempt to make this divine flower shoot forth from Ibn 'Arabī's tree of Paradise is certainly one of his less convincing ventures.[24] The reappearance of this all-embracing structure of the heavenly city in the *Book of the Ladder* is still considered by its editor "a distant and faint starting point" of Dante's vision.[25]

Curiously enough, in an Ethiopic version of the Apocalypse of the Virgin, Her last steps toward the realm of the blessed lead Her to their *civitatem sicut rosam constructam*, whose borders are secret and whose foundations are unknown.[26] Since none of the extant manuscripts of this apocalypse are older than the seventeenth century and none of its older versions contain any trace of the rose city of Heaven as it appears in the Ethiopian text, Dr. Silverstein of the University of Chicago attributes the striking similarity of that vision in the Italian poem and in the Ethiopic homily to an indirect borrowing from Dante, presumably introduced into Ethiopia by the Venetian painter Niccolò Brancaleone, who accompanied a famous Portuguese embassy to Prester John, the emperor of Abyssinia. Since this artist influenced the religious iconography of that distant Christian country, it seems reasonable to admit some literary mediation of the kind and an indirect borrowing from the Italian poem. But it would be strange, indeed, and totally inexplicable if Dante's influence on Ethiopian literature were confined to just this one detail.

It seems more sensible to associate this Coptic text with Arabic apocalyptic literature and its descriptions of Paradise as a symmetrical heavenly structure traversed by rivers of light and peopled by singing angels.[27] However, the simile of the rose never appears in these Arabic texts. It may be an accidental parallel in the Ethiopian apocalypse and in Dante's poem. In dealing with Asín Palacios' book, one of the most competent Islamists of our time has explained these coincidences as psychological parallelisms which he considers more probable than any direct *emprunt littéral*.[28] Fortunately, there is no need to discuss here

âge latin (Paris, 1932), pp. 230 ff., and Phyllis Hodgson, "A Ladder of Four Ranges, etc.," *MLR*, XLIV (1949), 465 ff. For Caracciolo's text see Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 360 ff.

[23] *Paradiso*, XXX, 117; XXXI, 1

[24] *Escatología*, pp. 225 ff.

[25] Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 538 f.

[26] See Theodore Silverstein, "Dante's Heavenly Rose: an Analogue or a Borrowing," *Harvard Theol. Review*, XLIII (1949), 149 ff.

[27] Asín Palacios, *op. cit.*, p. 212; Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 90 ff.

[28] L. Massignon, "Les Études islamiques à l'étranger," *Revue du Monde Musulman*, XXXVI (1919), 23 ff.

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this fundamental problem of comparativism. Human ideas are spread over the world like pollen carried by the wind and may sprout anywhere "like grain of spelt," as Dante says. The Ethiopic version of Mary's Ascension does not seem a fertile ground for this kind of poetical seed.

Nor should Dante's model of the heavenly rose be sought in exotic works of which he probably had no direct knowledge and which never contained an image of that sort. The whole external and symbolic structure of Dante's heavenly city can easily be reconnected with Biblical figures, the system of Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite, and the Neoplatonic revival in the Christian mystical literature of the late Middle Ages.[29]

The image of the heavenly rose could have been suggested by the treatise *De Rosa* written in the thirteenth century by Petrus de Mora, cardinal of Capua, who conceived of the *chorus martyrum* as a rose with all the attributes given by Dante to the realm of his *milizia santa* in the thirtieth canto of the *Paradiso*.[30] All these images, including the Ethiopic heavenly rose, developed from the very symbol and designation of the Virgin as a flower in mediaeval liturgy and poetry.[31] Her heavenly reign over the saints and martyrs displays its glory in the very form suggested by the name and attribute of its Queen.

When compared with the dryness, crudity, and pedestrian character of the Mohammedan eschatology as represented by the *Book of the Ladder*, those Biblical and Christian texts and figures have a metaphorical range, an intensity of accent, and a visionary depth as fascinating and stirring as the *Book of the Ladder* is insipid and tedious. These stylistic concerns should never be neglected in investigations of sources and models of a poetic masterpiece. No literary alchemy can transform dust into gold. One can understand that such a dry and unimaginative poet as Fazio degli Uberti, or Frederico Frezzi, the author of the *Quadriregio*, was attracted by some aspects of the Mohammedan other world.[32] I would even suppose that Guillaume de Deguilleville, the French contemporary of these Italian didactic poets, could have found in the *Book of the Ladder*, besides the ubiquitous *Roman de la Rose*, the outline of his successful *Pèlerinage de l'âme*.[33] But to people aware of the essential aspects of the mediaeval world and the intimate sources of Dante's in-

[29] See my article, "Sacra Doctrina e Theologia Mystica: Il Canto XXX del Paradiso," *Giornale Dantesco*, XXXVI (1935), 1-23.

[30] *Spicilegium Solesmiense* (Paris, 1855), III, 489 ff.

[31] See C. Jorey, *La Rose dans l'antiquité et au moyen âge* (Paris, 1892) and *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 7-9. A. Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens* (Linz, 1893), pp. 183-192 and *passim*, collects numerous examples of this symbol, mainly from mediaeval Latin hymns and patristic literature in which the concepts of Maria as "coeli rosa" or "flos Paradisi" are expressed in many variations.

[32] Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 540 ff.

[33] Published by Stürzinger, London, Roxburghe Club, 1895. See A. Farinelli, *Dante e la Francia* (Milano, 1908), I, 147 ff.

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spiration, the idea of the poet imagining his transcendent journey in imitation of Mohammed's ascension will never be plausible, no matter how striking some analogies may appear. Neither Asín Palacios' dialectical ability nor Cerulli's painstaking illustration of these affinities can make the opinion of a competitive undertaking more convincing or even simply acceptable.[34]

One of the greatest fallacies in the discussion of this problem consists in the assumption of an alleged sympathy or familiarity of Dante with Mohammedan doctrines and civilization. Cerulli has reduced to correct proportions Asín's insistent overestimation of the poet's interest in Islamic thought and poetry.[35] We know now that all references to, and quotations from, Mohammedan authors in Dante's works are borrowed from Albert the Great or Thomas Aquinas.[36] It should be added that none of these references or allusions ever concerns any special feature of Mohammedan literature or religion. If the mention of 'Alī in *Inferno* XXVIII, 32 seems to contradict this assertion, it should be borne in mind that this cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet was known in the Western world in connection with the half-legendary figure of the Old Man of the Mountain, the Great Master of the Assassins, who, as Joinville stated, "ne créoit pas en Mahommet, ainçois créoit en la loi de Haali."[37] The schism provoked by his cult among the Mohammedans was well known to the Dominican Yves le Breton, Marco Polo, and some chroniclers of the Crusades.[38] The figure of the chief of the sect was so popular that allusions to him in early Provençal poetry could be understood, as has been recently shown, without explanation.[39] It is more probable that Dante learned about 'Alī and his schismatic cult through these legendary channels rather than from direct Mohammedan sources or any treatise on Ismailic doctrines and the mystical power of the Imām.

[34] Cerulli's conclusive remarks at the end of his volume express the opinion that Dante intended to oppose a Christian vision of the other world to Mohammed's ascension as described in what was considered a second sacred book of Islam.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 507 ff. I went even further in my article on "Dante e l'Oriente," *Giornale Dantesco*, XXXIX (1938), overlooked by Cerulli.

[36] The authors indirectly known to Dante and quoted in his works are, in his spelling, Albumasar, Alfraganus, Algazali, Alpetragius (i.e., al-Bitrūjī), Averroes, and Avicenna. On these authors see G. Sarton, *op. cit.*, vol. II, and C. A. Nallino, *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, 6 vols. (Rome, 1944-1948).

[37] Jean sire de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. M. Natalis de Wailly, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1874), pp. 250 ff., where some points of the doctrines attributed to 'Alī are mentioned as characteristic of Assassins and Bedouins.

[38] See Charles E. Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," *Speculum*, XXII (1947), 497-519.

[39] See Frank M. Chambers, "The Troubadours and the Assassins," *MLN*, LXIV (1949), 245-247. To the material collected in this article one could add the mention of the Assassins in the first sonnet of the *Fiore*, once attributed to Dante and published in an appendix of his *Opere*, ed. by the Società Dantesca Italiana (Florence, 1921).

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What early commentators have to say about the mention of 'Alī in the famous episode of the *Inferno* confirms the general ignorance of his historical and doctrinal background.[40]

This ignorance does not contradict the profound penetration of the mediaeval mind by Arabic thought, science, and literature. The influence of Avicenna, the impact of Averroes, and the effect of other Mohammedan philosophers on Western civilization were so powerful that the intellectual accomplishments of Thomas Aquinas and the monastic reorganization of schools and learning hardly succeeded in stemming the tide overflowing the Christian systems of dogmas and beliefs. Averroism, condemned by Mohammedans and Christians alike, spread from the Sicilian court to the provincial residences of imperial vicars as a sort of Ghibelline philosophy, and settled down in the Universities of Naples and Padua as a manifestation of secular and independent thought.[41] How deeply Dante's mind was affected by this intellectual current has been shown by E. Gilson and Bruno Nardi[42] in numerous contributions to the knowledge of contemporary philosophical culture.

But the high esteem in which the Arab philosophers were held by Dante and his friends, and the affinity discovered in their works and doctrines by Christian thinkers, did not depend upon any agreement with Mohammedan tenets and beliefs. The admiration for, and the exploitation of, the Arab philosophers never mitigated the universal Christian hatred of the Prophet, his deeds, his "law," his mosques and schools, and the religious literature of his adherents. The absorption of the vast influx of Arabic thought by the Christian world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries took place on such a large scale because the bulk and essence of that philosophical and scientific literature were by no means a Mohammedan legacy, but rather the epilogue and revival of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science assimilated and handed down by Arabs of all climates and sects. In other words, the Western world Christianized the Greeks and not the Arabs, after the great Mohammedan philosophers had striven to reconcile the teachings of Mohammed with the doctrines of Aristotle, Plato, and the Neoplatonic school.

Dante expressed this fact symbolically by mentioning Avicenna and Averroes in the retinue of the Greek philosophers and scientists gathered

[40] To the example given by Francesco Buti and mentioned by Cerulli (p. 508, note 2), more could be added from other early commentators up to Cristoforo Landino. See also Alessandro d'Ancona, "La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XIII (1889).

[41] See L. Olschki, *The Genius of Italy* (New York, 1949), chap. VI.

[42] E. Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher* (New York, 1949), pp. 168 ff., 212 ff.; B. Nardi, *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome, 1944), pp. 210 ff., and other essays by the same author mentioned in the notes. Also, for some particular aspects of this philosophy in the poetry of the *dolce stil nuovo*, see J. E. Shaw, *Guido Cavalcanti's Theory of Love* (Toronto, 1949).

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on the fresh meadow around the "noble castle" of the arts.[43] The familiarity rapidly acquired by Christian theologians with these heathen and Mohammedan thinkers depended upon the affinity of doctrines and methods which reconnected them with the early fathers of the Church, Greek and Latin alike. The Aristotelian and Platonic revival in this era was not the result of an adaptation of a Mohammedan theology to Christian tenets, but a return of the Western mind to the classical sources of intellectual enlightenment that had once directed the spiritual efforts of the early Churchmen in the first Councils and later on of religious leaders in synagogues, schools, and *madāris*. Individually, the new Aristotelianism of the high Middle Ages resumed in the Christian field the traditions of Tertullian and Boethius, whereas St. Augustine had kept alive the Platonic trends equally revived, with Arabic mediation, in the era of flowering scholasticism.

This fact, and the whole problem of such borrowings from doctrinal texts, may be illustrated by a striking example ignored by Asín Palacios and neglected by Dr. Cerulli. The only Arabic book that Dante certainly knew directly, in a Latin translation, and repeatedly quoted in his *Convivio*, is the treatise *De Causis*, intensely studied by leading contemporary theologians such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and many others.[44] From this work Dante admittedly drew two fundamental elements of his poetic and doctrinal inspiration: the theory of earthly and mystical love, as discussed in the *Convivio* (III, ii, 4; vi, 4) and accepted by the *fedeli d'amore* of the "sweet new style," and the "metaphysics of light" that permeates his vision of Paradise.[45]

Only a few of his contemporaries knew that this very influential treatise was the work of an Arabic writer. It was generally attributed to Aristotle, although it is as far from the doctrines of the Stagirite as a Neoplatonic emanatistic system of theology can be. In fact, Thomas Aquinas recognized in the work an abridged translation of the *Principles of Theology* by Proclus, the fifth-century synthesizer of Neoplatonic doctrines. It is by virtue of these very doctrines, familiarized by St. Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite, and not by any Mohammedan contribution, that the little book became so popular that it affected the feelings and imagination of a whole generation of Italian poets

[43] *Inferno*, IV, 130-134. The great Islamic philosophers since al-Fārābī and al-Kindī were always aware of the dependence of their doctrines and methods on their Greek forerunners and models. See, on this point, R. Walzer, "The Rise of Islamic Philosophy," *Oriens*, III (1950), 1-19.

[44] For this treatise, and literature on it, see the article cited above in note 29; and also the critical edition of Dante's *Convivio* by G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (1939), I, 264, note. On the possible author of the treatise and on its sources and influence see Manuel Alonso, S.J., "El Liber de Causis," *Al-Andalus*, IX (1944), 43 ff., and X (1945), 429 ff.

[45] See Rocco Murari, "Il *De Causis* e la sua fortuna nel Medio Evo," *Giornale storico della lett. ital.*, XXXIV (1899), 93-117.

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in the spirit of their master.[46] This circumstance shows that the deep interest of Dante's contemporaries in all kinds of Arab philosophers was not directed by any curiosity concerning Mohammedan doctrines and orthodoxy, but exclusively by those aspects of Islamic literature which, in their turn, are a manifestation of a common intellectual background, Aristotelian or Platonic.

In the specific cases of Dante's theory of love and of his "metaphysics of light," it is unnecessary, and even unhistoric, to reconnect their poetic substantiation with Ibn 'Arabī, as Asín eloquently does, or with any other Mohammedan mystical writer.[47] Avicenna and all the ramifications of Neoplatonic emanatism in Arabic and Jewish literature gave doctrinal support to a concept already consecrated by early Christian theologians after Jesus had proclaimed himself as *lux mundi* and the embodiment of divine light.[48] All these doctrines were characteristic of contemporary Franciscan theologians and were systematically collected in the treatise *De Luce*, composed in 1280 by Bartolomeo da Bologna, a Minorite professor of theology in the university of that town.[49] There is no reason to insist on the eschatological offspring of Mohammedan theology or to refer to Arabic scientific authors in order to explain Dante's familiarity with these concepts and the inspiration he could have drawn from them.

This conclusion should not minimize the importance of Arabic science and literature in Western civilization. Their impact, as indicated above, cannot be overestimated. It affects the most characteristic manifestations of the intellectual revival of the thirteenth century. Dante agreed with his contemporaries in respect for, and exploitation of, Arabic science and philosophy, but he was, nevertheless, passionate and radical in rejecting and despising Mohammed the Prophet, his work and interpreters, and what was called his *deliramenta*, that is, everything directly inspired by the Koran or known from his authentic or fabulous biography. Nothing from these sources was ever allowed to influence the religious manifestations of Christian feelings and beliefs, no matter how

[46] Its impact on the philosophical mind of the thirteenth century is attested by its imitation and exploitation in the anonymous "Liber de Causis primis et secundis," published by R. de Vaux, O.P., in *Notes et textes sur l'avicennisme latin aux confins des XII^e-XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1934), pp. 88-140. The treatise was attributed to Avicenna.

[47] It may be recalled that al-Ghazzālī's and Alfraganus' contributions to the emanatistic theory of light had been collected and summarized in the *Speculum Doctrinale* of Vincent of Beauvais (lib. XV, chap. 5), an author certainly known by Dante. The speculative interest in this subject was accompanied by scientific studies of optics promoted by a contemporary Latin translation of Alhazen's famous *Thesaurus Opticae* and the treatise on the same subject by Witelo. On these authors see Sarton, *op. cit.*, I, 721, and C. Bäumker, *Witelo: Ein Philosoph und Naturforscher des dreizehnten Jahrhundrets* (Münster, 1908).

[48] John 8 : 12.

[49] Published by P. I. Squadrani, O.F.M., in *Antonianum*, VII (1932), fasc. 2-4.

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many motifs of Arabic architecture and decoration abounded in churches and chapels or how many poetical topics might have inspired troubadours and story tellers in Christian Europe. There is no doubt that when King Alfonso commissioned his Jewish physician and his Italian official to translate the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj,* he intended not to propagate it as a source of Christian inspiration or of literary enjoyment, but rather to use it as an instrument of controversy in his struggle against Mohammedan aberrations. That the king and his protégés succeeded in that attempt is shown by the author of the Spanish treatise *Sobre la seta mahometana,* in which the *Book of the Ladder* is summarized "porque entendais la gran nezedad de los que estonce le creyeron e agora le creen."[50]

Dante made the same distinction between the Arabs as depositories and mediators of ancient thought, on the one hand, and as adepts of a false religion, on the other. This is shown, respectively, by his reverent mention of their leading philosophers and the horrible punishment he inflicted on Mohammed as a sower of scandal and discord.[51] Only an outburst of implacable hatred could have suggested the vile words and repulsive images with which the poet made the Prophet the most abject figure of his *Inferno.* Dante not only deprived him of his natural dignity as a human being, but also denied him the historical function of a religious leader. It seems impossible, indeed, to reconcile these feelings with Dante's alleged interest in a sacred book of Islam describing the ascension of that malefactor to the throne of God and his apotheosis in the light of Heaven.

None of the analogies between Mohammedan and Dantean eschatology is striking and relevant enough to overcome the contrast between these two attitudes. Consequently there is no reason to add Mohammed's *mi'rāj* (ascension) to the inspiring prototypes of Dante's poetic and mystical journey. Dante revealed the authentic sources of his inspiration by mentioning his precursors at the beginning of his poem: Aeneas and his *descensus ad inferos* as desribed by Virgil, and St. Paul and his vision of the Christian other world.[52] He could say of himself:

Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono.

Could he have added Mohammed as a third forerunner in his transcendent journey? In answering this question in the only possible way, one should consider that similarities of a structural and episodic character have no conclusive value against a totally discrepant background of faith, sentiment, and artistic inspiration.

[50] Cerulli, *op. cit.,* p. 265.
[51] *Inferno,* IV, 143 f., and XXVIII, 22-63, respectively.
[52] *Inferno,* II, 13-36.

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The publication of the Latin and French translations of the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* has not only demolished the skillful architecture of Asín Palacios' assumptions, but has also contributed to the negative solution of the whole "questione delle fonti arabo-spagnuole della *Divina Commedia.*" The analogies between the poem and Mohammedan eschatological literature should now be investigated in the common field of other-world speculations and not through a comparative discussion of single episodes separated from their spiritual and poetic context. The Koran had given the impulse to all these Mohammedan visions, although its data on the shape of Paradise and Hell are scanty and contradictory. Its famous description of Paradise has been for centuries one of the most controversial subjects of Mohammedan theology, as well as of Christian curiosity and vituperation.

Modern investigation of the Koranic sources has revealed how much Mohammed himself had drawn from apocalyptical treatises popular in his day in the heart and borderlands of Arabia.[53] The early Mohammedan visionary literature depended on Jewish, Christian, and Parsi sources of the same character and content. The angelology of Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite was known to the Arabs of Syria and Egypt as well as to the Christian fathers of the East and West.[54] The pagan Hell was a source of meditation for both. The further development of Mohammedan eschatological literature in the high Middle Ages seems to have been an accomplishment mainly of Spanish Moors living in a Christian and Mozarabic environment and therefore longer and more directly influenced by Christian and Biblical trends and motifs than their coreligionists of Asia.

Spain was for mediaeval Islam what Syria had been in the first centuries of the Hegira, and Persia around A.D. 1000. Asín Palacios revealed in three substantial volumes the *sentido cristiano* in the doctrines of Al-Ghazzālī, the Persian master of Mohammedan mystical theology.[55] Moreover, he studied in many of its aspects *el Islam cristianizado* as shown in the numerous works of Ibn 'Arabī, the Murcian.[56] It is only consistent to infer from these interrelations that the builders of the Mo-

[53] See J. Horowitz, "Mohammed's Himmelfahrt," *Der Islam*, IX (1908) 159 ff. (with many bibliographical references on the subject). The eminent Russian Turcologist, V. V. Barthold, pointed out that the spread of Islam among the heathen tribes of the Russian and Asiatic steppes was essentially due to the fascination exerted on those rugged nomads by tales of the other world as developed in the lower groups of Persian sūfism and the Mohammedan eschatology, both strongly influenced by Nestorian traditions and early Christian, Zoroastrian, and Manichean mythologies. See W. Barthold, *Histoire des Turcs d'Asie centrale*, adaptation française par Mme M. Donskis (Paris, 1945), p. 57.

[54] See W. Eickmann, *Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans* (Leipzig-New York. 1918).

[55] *La espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido cristiano* (Madrid, 1939).

[56] *El Islam cristianizado: estudio del 'sufismo' a través de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia* (Madrid, 1931).

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hammedan other world in Moorish Spain worked on common ground with the authors of Christian eschatological literature of popular or learned character. In this, Ibn 'Arabī and the author of the *Book of the Ladder* would have continued a mythical and literary tradition already started by the Prophet himself and continued by his theologians and eschatological writers.

It is time now to start a systematic investigation of the Biblical, pagan, Koranic, Oriental, early Christian, and mediaeval sources of this Mohammedan eschatology. This task should be left entirely to Arabists particularly versed in the early religious literature of Islam and in the peculiar aspects of Spanish and Maghreb Mohammedanism. To avoid confusion and misleading conclusions, Dante should be left out of these investigations and his other world considered in the light of those traditions of faith and culture which represent the substance of his mind and the essential tissue of his intellectual formation.

Accordingly, Dr. Cerulli's most important contribution is the critical editing of the two translations which make up for the lost original of the *Book of the Ladder* and display most of the traditional motifs of Mohammedan eschatology. Students of Romance philology will find in the book a new text in Old French worth studying for its style, vocabulary, and possible influence on late mediaeval didactic literature. With the help of Muñoz' edition of the same work from the same manuscripts,[57] it will be possible to replace some readings of Cerulli's text which are obscure or puzzling,[58] despite the remarkable skill of this versatile Orientalist in the editing of a mediaeval text of unusual character and style. Italianists will have a new opportunity to study the activity of political exiles living in Spain and writing in French, such as Bonaventura of Siena, the author of this retranslation from a Hispano-Arabic text. They may be prompted to investigate the Hispano-Italian cultural relations which appear as scanty and aimless in the Middle Ages as they became intense and ubiquitous in later periods of European civilization.

Moreover, these translations of a religious book of the Arabs add a colorful element to the picture of King Alfonso's efforts towards a consistent understanding of human trends and interests in all branches of spiritual and intellectual life. This attitude of the learned king coincided with his imperial ambitions and claims at the height of his prestige. In this he followed the example of Frederick II, whose successor he strove to become, and inaugurated the tradition of learned kings which for three centuries added power and glory to the potentates of Europe.

For mediaevalists Cerulli has gathered the evidence of the widespread interest of Mohammedan and Christian theologians in the shape and sig-

[57] See note 7 above.

[58] See the remarks of G. Levi della Vida, *Nuova luce sulle fonti islamiche*, pp. 386 f.

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nificance of the other world. The discussions on this topic carried on in schools and *madāris* during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries throw light on the discrepancies as well as on the affinities of approach, methods, and conclusions. The charming story of the three equal rings symbolizing the equivalence of the three Biblical religions[59] should not influence the discussion of these analogies, or exaggerate the mutual understanding of theologians in the three fields of faith and thought. As a matter of fact, if there has been almost at all times an *Islām cristianizado*, there has never been an Islamized Christianity in respect to its orthodoxy and soteriological system.[60]

The discrepancies between Christian and Mohammedan eschatology result mainly from the materialistic and hedonistic images of Paradise and the sectarian character of Hell conceived according to Koranic patterns, which was always bitterly opposed in all Christian literature on the subject. Conversely, the affinities appear in all evidence as the factual and logical consequences of the common foundations of the two creeds. Both Christianity and Mohammedanism are religions of salvation based on Biblical revelation and Hellenistic traditions of thought and culture. They developed a mythology which betrays the common origin rather than a mutual exchange of motifs and images.[61]

Under these circumstances it is surprising that the mythological analogies between the two systems of theology are so few and irrelevant.[62] A sober and critical comparison of the two texts shows that Mohammedan eschatology as displayed in the *Book of the Ladder* contributes nothing in any appreciable way to the structural and episodic scaffold of the *Divina Commedia* or to our historical and interpretative understanding of the poem.

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[59] G. Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, I, 3.

[60] Even the Mozarabs of Spain, who had absorbed and spread Arabic culture and developed a liturgy and religious art of their own, did not develop heretical doctrines and movements, but preserved for many centuries an unimpeachable Catholic orthodoxy.

[61] Cf. P. J. Henninger, "Spuren christlicher Glaubenswahrheiten im Koran," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, V (1949), 127 ff. and 290 ff.

[62] Cerulli, *op. cit.*, pp. 522 ff.

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